

Research for this article was begun by the author in the U.S.A., where his work involved the observing and analyzing of American public opinion and its manipulation.

PROPAGANDA ANALYSIS

By ALFRED ROMAIN

SOME time ago the Americans, who have a flair for that sort of thing, created an "Institute of Propaganda Analysis." The object of this institute, it was explained to the public, was to detect propaganda in the daily environment of Joe Jones, the average American, and by means of such scrutinizing activity to render him more informed about all the evil influences trying to propagandize him. As is usual with such institutes, this one started its activities with a lot of propaganda about itself which, though not analyzed, served adequately to acquaint the American public with the lofty purpose of the science of propaganda analysis.

As evolved by the new institute, propaganda analysis became an interesting experiment in American publicity. It served to attach the stigma of "propaganda" to certain kinds of propaganda only, while omitting any reference to other kinds which deserve the label of propaganda to an equal degree. The research and publications of the Institute of Propaganda Analysis deal exclusively with that part of propaganda which it is politic to expose. In short, the work of the new institute is in itself propaganda.

This is to be regretted. Undoubtedly propaganda analysis could be of the greatest benefit to mankind—if only it included the whole range of propaganda. For this reason we shall attempt to supplement the work of the American institute by some propaganda-analytical observations of our own.

In our search to discover the principles and methods of American propaganda, we are squarely hit by one basic realization: the main element—the underlying general principle of American propaganda—is not to appear as propaganda. With the aid of a series of psychological devices, the nature, purpose, and intention of propaganda are carefully veiled. Just as the sugar-coating on a pill disguises the taste of the medicine, American propaganda is covered by a sugar-coating designed to conceal the fact that the consumers of the product are being fed with propaganda. The sugar-coating on American propaganda has been so perfect, has suited the American taste so well, that the American public has swallowed most of the propaganda pills regardless of their contents.

* * *

Our propaganda analysis requires a system

of definitions as basic working tools. These should describe and, if possible, standardize the main types of propaganda, the various methods and tricks of the trade, the "devices" of the American propagandist which are as numerous as they are ingenious.

TOO MUCH INFORMATION

American propaganda is largely conditioned by its overabundance. This deluge of propagandistic information, education, and entertainment may be largely the incidental by-product of competitive private enterprise; nevertheless, it is cleverly exploited by the American propagandist to swing public opinion on a quantity basis. This "excessive quantities" device works almost as a suppression of news or a sort of censorship by drowning opposing propaganda which, if it is lacking the tremendous resources of propaganda vehicles supported by big business or the government, cannot hope to compete. If you want to prevent somebody from listening to a violin, you could stop the violinist or shut him up in a soundproof room—that would be suppression; but you can also place a brass band next to the violinist—that would be on the principle of "excessive quantities."

This method is one of the most useful for the propagandist, because overabundance is impressive and likely to create confidence in the material presented. Its effectiveness is demonstrated by the generally held belief that "we Americans are the best-informed nation in the world." And, indeed, the quantities of information poured out upon the Americans are tremendous. The average citizen can read, hear, or digest only a very small fraction of the material offered. Actually to read a paper like *The New York Times* would require the better part of one's working day. Just imagine the surplus of information overwhelming the average upper-middle-class New Yorker who, in addition to the voluminous *New York Times*, buys at least one evening paper, such as *The Sun*, and reads popular magazines such as *Time*, *Life*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and perhaps *Fortune*. If all this material, without the advertisements, were put in book form, it would correspond each week to approximately 14 volumes of 300 pages each. Granted our citizen reads only a small part of all this, there is still the radio; there are innumerable meetings and speeches; there is bona-fide

literature; and there are numbers of other periodicals, to some of which he or his wife may subscribe.

Together all these contain such vast quantities of propaganda that it would require almost superhuman effort to sift and analyze all this material and discern the propaganda carried by it. The "excessive quantities" device has, in fact, a bewildering and drugging effect. People begin to wonder what it is all about. They feel intellectually helpless, not knowing where to turn. In this peculiar state of mind, the majority of people seem to be very susceptible to mass psychoses and even mass hysteria (spy hunts, Lindbergh baby, attack from Mars). They are the ones who fall for "tabloid" propaganda. On the other hand, there is a minority which tries to keep a clear head by sifting the masses of news and doing its own thinking; for it the American propaganda machine provides highly intellectual magazines as well as news-digesting periodicals such as *Time*, to feed it with even more material and lead its thinking in the right direction.

The fact that the "excessive quantities" device makes news censorship partly or wholly superfluous was proved by the propaganda activities of the "Committee on Public Information" during the Great War. George Creel, today one of the of State Department's spokesmen, built up American war propaganda at that time on this principle, largely avoiding any censorship of the press. Before he was entrusted with the direction of the Committee on Public Information he proposed this technique to President Wilson, stressing that the need was "for expression, not repression."

CONSPIRACIES OF SILENCE

Nevertheless, suppression of news is also practised and has always been practised in the United States. Most American editors respect instructions issued by their publishers or outside pressure groups to bury in silence matters disagreeable to them, regardless of their news value. This has frequently been revealed in the case of such large advertisers as the department stores and patent-medicine firms, which usually succeed in suppressing news harmful to their business interests. In many cases, suppression of news has also been claimed by American labor unions accusing the capitalist press of withholding news from the public about antilabor violence on the part of strike breakers and the police. In the field of politics, American statesmen opposed to Wall Street have frequently complained of a mysterious conspiracy of silence to which their statements were subjected.

However, the American propagandist seems ill at ease with this method. It is always a risky one, because public confidence would be quickly lost if news suppression were obvious and frequent. It would appear that American

propagandists consider repressive tactics, official or unofficial censorship, an emergency measure to be used only in cases where vital interests are threatened and where the desired propaganda effect cannot be achieved by other methods.

The "*conspiracy of silence*" device is the other extreme of the process of news selection which is one of the principal weapons in the hands of American propagandists. This brings us to the conception of "news" as it has been developed in America.

INVIOLE NEWS

The American press covers up much of its propaganda by presenting it as news and for that reason has done everything possible to surround the word "news" with a veritable halo. Indeed, the ethics of the American press are built around the idea that news is inviolate—that to supply the public with news is the mission of the American press.

The antonym of "news" is "editorial," in other words the opinion of the newspaper. The American press emphasizes this difference by reserving a special page, the editorial page, for the opinions of the newspaper, editorial opinion being supposedly restricted to that page and not mixed up with the news. And, indeed, American news agencies as well as practically all American papers avoid any obvious editorializing in the news and try to create and strengthen the impression that the "news" presented by them is unadulterated and factual, without any propagandistic slant. This is the "*news vs. editorial*" device which accounts for much of the average American's confidence in his press. In reading the news—especially sensational news—he is quite unprepared for propaganda.

It is hardly necessary to stress the immense propagandistic advantages that grow out of this. Without being suspected of propaganda, newspapers and news agencies are in a position to select, suppress, to "play up" or "play down," to "slant," to "kill," or to "bury" the news according to their propaganda strategy.

LION ESCAPES

The American propagandist knows how to exploit the fact that news as such arouses little suspicion of being propaganda. Not only does he slant the news, he creates it wherever he can and by whatever ingenious device he can think of. Some of the greatest commercial and political propagandists in the United States owe their success to the use of this method, which we shall term the "*manufactured news*" device, meaning all acts or statements of news value deliberately created for propagandistic purposes.

In order to illustrate the working principles of this propaganda method, let us recall one of

the tricks performed by a press agent for a circus some time ago. His was the job of advertising the show and getting some news items into the papers to draw the attention of the public to the fact that the circus was about to start its performances. While the circus tent was being erected, the circus suddenly announced that its famous "man-eating" lion had escaped. This naturally resulted in a great sensation and panic, drawing the reporters from all the papers to the scene. The reporters wrote thrilling "stories" about the exciting hunt for the lion, which remained on its escapade just long enough for the circus to get all the publicity it needed—many thousand dollars' worth of it. Then the lion was "found" under sensational circumstances near the circus where, in fact, it had always been hidden.

The "manufactured news" device is designed to break into the headlines, which are of strategic importance to propagandists. Basic forms of "manufactured news" are the interview and the press conference. In addition there are trips made by politicians, conferences, meetings, special stunts, and even concrete political or military steps which are sometimes taken by the Americans for reasons of publicity or propaganda. Roosevelt's trip to Hawaii and Alaska, generally considered to be nothing but an election-campaign move, exemplifies the current use of the "manufactured news" device.

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Typical of democratic propaganda technique is the "public opinion" device. This psychological approach works by presenting propaganda as merely mirroring public opinion. The entire American press uses this device, professing to speak for the public and to express the people's will. It is the traditional editorial appeal in America, going back to the early days when the small-town editor was in close touch with everybody else in town, when he really expressed the opinion of his neighbors and, indeed, fought their battles for them. But in our days of a newspaper industry and newspaper chains with vast editions and impersonal masses of readers, the "public opinion" device acts merely as a very effective smokescreen for the propagandist. It is built on the misleading logic that newspapers, because they express the opinion of the people, cannot possibly be propaganda designed to influence the opinion of the people.

The American press does everything in its power to substantiate the impression that it reflects public opinion. Letters to the editor, "inquiring photographers" who buttonhole people in the street and ask for their opinion on current topics, crusades for noncontroversial humanitarian causes such as public health, and many other means, are used to keep the "public opinion" device convincingly alive.

That is why the newspapers give such a tremendous build-up to the principle of freedom of the press, acting on the general assumption that only a press free from government control can accurately and independently present public opinion.

The "public opinion" device is also a standard technique with American politicians, who emphasize their identity with the common people and, having thus established confidence, carry their propaganda point. The psychology of this method is based on an appeal to the ego of the reader or listener. The propagandist flatters him by telling him that it is his opinion that is being expressed, thus making him—the nameless atom of the masses—feel important. It is the same basic appeal that Dale Carnegie has demonstrated in his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*: Do not openly express your own will and intentions but try to come as close as possible to representing the interests and opinion of the man you wish to influence.

As part of the "public opinion" device, the American propaganda vehicles usually contain more or less severe criticism of the Government and its personnel, of the policies and measures of the Administration, including its highest exponents. The American public's pride in this shows how great is the confidence-building effect of such criticism as far as the integrity of the propaganda media is concerned. At the same time, such criticism acts as a safety valve enabling a lot of steam to be blown off without causing much harm.

THE BAND WAGON

In order to convince the people that his cause is winning, the American propagandist uses the "band wagon" device as another method of mass suggestion. "Get on the band wagon!" has long been a popular slogan in American political life. It goes back to the days when a brass band seated on a farmer's wagon called the neighbors to a political meeting in the next town. Everybody who wanted to join "got on the band wagon," i.e., sat down in the space behind the brass band to get a free ride. The space on the band wagon was naturally limited; hence "you had better get on the band wagon before it is too late." During the past few months, Americans have been using the "band wagon" device on a gigantic scale in the propaganda campaign waged to influence a number of European countries.

FAIR PLAY TO THE OPPONENT

Among the propaganda methods that go to build up confidence and good will for the American press is the "fair play" device. It is common practice with American newspapers and radio stations to stage demonstrations of "fairness" to prove that both sides of the issue

are represented and have an even chance of making their point. During election campaigns, newspapers often give equal space to both candidates although pledged to one party. In the foreign field, too, the "fair play" device is used notably by *The New York Times*, which at one time printed the daily communiqués of all belligerents and occasionally publishes quite objective reports about countries it otherwise violently opposes. The result is that even well-educated and intelligent Americans are apt to be taken in by this method, so that every now and again such newspapers can afford to put over misrepresentations or even downright lies.

This method is often used in conjunction with the "quotation" device, which serves to create and support an appearance of objectivity and authority. During the Great War, many of the propaganda pamphlets issued by the Committee on Public Information in America used this method to lend authority to their claims and veil the propagandistic nature of their products. Largely or solely composed of quotations were such notorious pamphlets as *Conquest and Kultur* and *German War Practices*, which were spread in editions of one or two millions throughout America and abroad. During the present war, too, many American propaganda books and pamphlets have adopted this technique.

SOME DETAILS ARE CORRECT

In order to make his propaganda stories plausible, the American propagandist employs the "accurate details" device, the technique of which consists in giving as many accurate or seemingly accurate names, figures, places, and other details as possible, with the implication that the rest of the story is just as accurate and reliable. Looking over atrocity stories of the first and second World Wars, one is amazed at the brazen use of this technique, which made the purest fabrications and lies plausible to millions of Americans. Quoted and documented as a lie by Lord Ponsonby in his *Falsehood in Wartime* is the following propaganda story, a perfect example of the "accurate details" device:

... It was on October 23, 1918, that our detachment, the Fifth Marines, Second Division, entered Suippes, situated north of Chalons and west of the Argennes Forest, the village having just been evacuated by the Germans. There we found a naked girl nailed to a barn door. In addition about half of the coffins in the village churchyard had been torn from the graves and been opened, apparently with the idea of despoiling them.

Due to the accurate details in the first part of the story, it found widespread belief, although it was proved to be a pure invention: throughout the year 1918 there were no Germans in Suippes, where the alleged incident took place, the village having been in the possession of the French, behind the Allied lines, during the time in question.

RED HERRINGS AND GENERALITIES

When the American propagandist wants to hide something and draw off the public's attention in another direction, he uses the "red herring" device, by giving undue emphasis and publicity to details or facts irrelevant to the case. As an example, let us consider the American propaganda toward South America. Time and again, the "red herring" device has been used to detract the South American public's attention from the imperialistic designs of the United States. In most cases, the red herring was a trumped-up charge of "Nazi subversive activities." The flood of news about the province of Patagonia which, according to American propaganda, was on the verge of becoming a German colony in 1940, demonstrates the application of this device. On the whole, it has worked only too well to confuse the South Americans.

The "glittering generalities" device is also part of the technique of confusion and diversion practiced by the American press, radio, and other media of propaganda. Generally accepted principles, stock phrases, truisms, popular slogans, etc., are emphasized in order to carry the propagandist's point, although the actual facts and details of the case may have little or nothing to do with the general terms referred to. Much of the propaganda designed to build up "democracy" is based on "glittering generalities," which are typical ingredients in most of Roosevelt's utterances. What else could it be but an application of this device when Roosevelt speaks about "freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion"; or when "equality" is stressed as a basic American principle, although it has not stopped the Americans from discriminating against Orientals, Negroes, Labor representatives, and other "undesirable" elements?

SMEARING THE VILLAIN

The negative counterpart to the "glittering generalities" device is the "smearing" device, extensively used in American politics. A notable example was the smearing of Upton Sinclair, who ran for Governor of California in 1934 on a liberal platform that threatened the introduction of social reforms and income-tax laws, extremely disagreeable to the vested interests. An American journalistic observer characterized the "smear" campaign carried on by the newspapers and the movie industry to cause his ultimate defeat as follows: "Had Sinclair been one tenth the villain or fool he was painted, the psychopathic officers would have had him years ago, if the Department of Justice had not nabbed him first It probably was the most vicious, felonious and reprehensible campaign ever conducted against a political candidate."

In the same way, the Lindberghs, father and

famous son, were violently "smeared" because they opposed American intervention during the first and second World Wars respectively. Lindbergh Sr. was "smeared" as being sympathetic to Germany and virtually branded a traitor because in 1915 he had warned President Wilson that "speculations and loans in foreign fields are likely to bring us into war. . . . The war-for-profit group has counterfeited patriotism." The same tactics were used against Lindbergh Jr. when he tried to succeed where his father had been defeated. He, too, was "smeared" as a friend or even an agent of Germany, largely by playing up the fact that he had received a decoration from the German Government in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the development of world aviation. Lindbergh had received similar medals from practically every government in the world; nevertheless, the incident suited the "smear" propagandists perfectly. In this case, the device works by playing up insignificant details which, torn out of their context, are likely to damage the person or group attacked.

Of course, there are other ways, too, by which a person, group, or country can be attacked. One of them, that is both more direct and more primitive than the technique described above, is the "name-calling" device. By this means, the propagandist tries to identify the object of his campaign with a certain expression or name that, by dint of constant repetition, has acquired a special meaning or emotional coloring. Thus Germans are called "Nazis" after the word "Nazi" has been identified, with villainous qualities. People who tried to prevent the war were called "appeasers" after this word had been given a highly derogatory and dishonorable meaning. Whoever dared to oppose interventionist war-mongering or even to speak in favor of peaceful relations with Germany was called a "Fifth Columnist" and thus automatically classed as unreliable, unpatriotic, a spy or at least an Axis agent, no matter how patriotic and how sincere his motives and personality.

CASUAL REMARKS AND WISECRACKS

A favorite technique is that of implication and shifting of emphasis by the "casual remark" device. Employing this subtle method, the American propagandist casually mentions his point preferably in a qualifying clause, in such a way as to create the impression that it has already long been accepted and is considered a matter of course. American interventionist propaganda made constant use of this method from 1939 until 1941, casually mentioning as a foregone conclusion that the United States would enter the war. In August 1941, for instance, Americans were asked in a widely read advertisement: "What will total war for the USA mean to you?" and "What must we do to win this war?" The answer to

these questions was that the reader should subscribe to *Fortune*; but for every new subscriber to the magazine many others were influenced by the implication—casually stated as a foregone conclusion—that war was inevitable. By this technique, the cause and morale of the isolationist camp were greatly affected, and the confused but peace-loving American masses were discouraged and prevented from joining them actively.

Everyone likes to laugh and enjoys a wisecrack. Hence the "laughter" device, the propagandistic play upon this instinctive urge, rates as one of the most successful propaganda methods in America, where cartoons—pictorial wisecracks—have an unprecedented circulation and influence, and where journalists and politicians base much of their success on their ability to amuse and entertain people while influencing them in their favor.

A typical example of this method is the regular column "Of All Things" in the well-known magazine *The New Yorker*, which consists of political wisecracks in tune with the policy of the magazine which, previous to America's entry into the war, was violently anti-isolationist. The American propagandist has long realized that his point, carried by a joke or a wisecrack, is far more effective than if stated in serious and prosaic terms. The public is always grateful for a chance to laugh and gladly accepts or readily forgives the propagandistic tendency of a wisecrack.

CONTRASTION—ATROCITIES—HOLLYWOOD

Part of the technique of entertainment, so typical of American propaganda, is the "sequence contrast" device. By this we mean the technique of composing and arranging articles and picture series in such a way as to create contrast and surprise and thereby catch the reader unawares. If outright propaganda is surrounded by purely entertaining or educational matter, the reader is much less prepared to watch out for propaganda than he would be if one propaganda story followed upon another. In this way, a strong and even comparatively transparent propaganda can still be got away with, the "sequence contrast" device acting as a protection against the public's suspicion.

Let us take as an example a typical American propaganda story about conditions in "Nazi" Germany, preceded by an article on birth control and followed by a juicy "inside" story from Hollywood: this would be typical of the American "sequence contrast" method. In addition to its value as a propaganda disguise, this technique prevents the public from getting tired of the propaganda presented. Many of the most influential magazines in America such as *Life*, *Time*, *Look*, *Reader's Digest*, as well as radio stations and newsreels, follow this device.

ALL-IMPORTANT HUMAN INTEREST

The "human interest" devices make use of the fact that human beings, consciously or subconsciously, like to hear and read about other human beings, how they make life livable and how they make a living; how they struggle through the less enjoyable aspects of life such as marital troubles, illness, and strokes of bad luck. The term includes all kinds of gossip as well as tidbits on health, beauty, clothing, home, food, occupation, hobbies, and sports.

With "human interest" we can identify methods that simplify propaganda issues by personalizing them while at the same time mobilizing the emotions. "Human interest" works in the subconscious sphere, where rational and emotional thinking are mixed and where sympathies and antipathies are created that ultimately turn into opinions and convictions. "Human interest" also makes use of the fact that people generalize without being aware of it; having reached a certain attitude toward one person, let us say a political candidate or a statesman, they tend to adopt the same attitude toward the group, community, or nation represented by that person.

There are various devices of the "human interest" group of which we shall mention only a few outstanding ones. In order to acquaint the public with the human side of persons in the public eye, the "close-up" device is employed which, imitating the well-known motion-picture technique, brings the camera up close to the personal life and into the home of the personality in question. The propaganda which made a popular leader out of Franklin Delano Roosevelt used the "close-up" device on a gigantic scale, focusing the light of publicity on all aspects and details of his private life. This method is part of the usual build-up of ambitious politicians and publicity-hungry people in other walks of life, including even the United States armed forces.

Of equal importance is the "parental love" device. "Mother and child" is the familiar theme of innumerable atrocity stories and effective American war posters. It has been instrumental in whipping up emotions in the "aid Britain" campaign as well as in hate-propaganda against the Axis. The "romance" device exploits sex appeal and romantic sentiment. The application of this device shows how closely human-interest technique is related to fiction writing, where it probably has its origin.

THE COMMERCIAL PRINCIPLE

Americans sell their propaganda both literally and figuratively speaking, with the result that most of it is presented in commercial form. The "commercial appearance" device has several psychological advantages. First of all, people have more respect for something they have to pay for. Moreover, something that looks "commercial" is generally not suspected too much of having a political propagandistic nature—"it doesn't look like propaganda." And finally, if such propaganda media as newspapers, magazines, and radio stations are pure business enterprises, the public feels that their purpose is profits and not politics.

* * *

Within the framework of a liberalistic state and society, the controlling influence of a small group of powerful capitalists can only be maintained over a long period of time if the masses of the people are kept unaware of this fact. Hence American propaganda, its structure and methods, are part of the American social and economic system, and the American public-opinion experts must take such pains to disguise their propaganda. The American public is lulled and drugged, entertained and distracted, flattered and coaxed by propaganda to prevent it from realizing what is going on, who is pulling the strings, and for what ulterior motives this is being done.

Experts

An egg producer could not make head or tail of the regulations issued by the Price Control Bureau on egg prices and applied to the buyer of a large company. The latter could also make nothing of them and went to the Public Relations officer of the company, who in turn rang up the official in charge of the bureau in Washington that had issued the regulations.

"Yes, I don't understand them either," said the official.

"But I thought you had written the regulations?"

"Sure," said the official, "but when these regulations left my desk they were three pages long, when I got them back from the legal department there were thirty-three pages."

Want Ad

On the door of an American shop hung a notice, which said:

"Sales clerk wanted. Whole or part-time. With or without experience.
Man or woman."

A passing wag wrote in pencil underneath: "Dead or alive."